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ABSTRACT

This study explored teacher perceptions toward giftedness among rural children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, before and after staff development. The study also explored the influence of staff development on teacher-designed instructional strategies to nurture giftedness. Five teachers at a K-4 school in rural Arkansas participated in the year-long study. Following the collection of baseline data, four inservice sessions were delivered over 2 months, and continuing staff development was provided in the form of team planning and demonstration teaching by the participant observer. Findings revealed multiple views of giftedness, personal influence, and the effect of systematic staff development for each of the five teachers. At the beginning of the study, each teacher relied on one or two indicators from four categories to determine giftedness: advanced thinking, creativity, academic excellence, or leadership abilities. Each teacher changed something about her perception of giftedness during the study. Initially, teachers had differing views about how they influenced learning potential. During the study, teachers came to feel that gifted potential was influenced through activities that involved students in thinking questions, creativity, experiential activities, and community resources. Two teachers implemented enrichment activities following staff development. Four of the five students nominated for the gifted program by the school were approved. A case study of one of the teachers is presented to illustrate findings. (Contains 24 references.) (TD)

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EFFECTIVE STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN A LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC RURAL SETTING: A MICROETHNOGRAPHY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF GIFTEDNESS

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the perceptions of five classroom teachers toward giftedness before and after staff development. Throughout the course of a year-long ethnographic study, in-depth observations, formal and informal interviews, and videotapes were used to triangulate the data and to reveal the criteria teachers used to guide their decisions about which children qualified for formal assessment into a program for gifted children.

Two research questions guided this investigation. They were: (a) What are the perceptions of teachers in a rural setting toward giftedness in children from economically disadvantaged conditions, and (b) in what ways does a systematic plan for staff development influence teachers' perceptions and practices among rural economically disadvantaged populations? These questions were examined during three phases of the study: (a) Phase I transpired over two months and included the collection of baseline data; (b) Phase II consisted of four inservice sessions over two months; and (c) Phase III continued over five months and involved staff development in the form of team planning and demonstration teaching by the participant observer.

Findings of the study revealed multiple views of giftedness, personal influence, and the effect of systematic staff development for each of the five teachers. At the beginning of the study, each teacher relied on one or two indicators from four categories to determine giftedness: (a) advanced thinking skills, (b) creative production, (c) academic excellence or (d) leadership abilities. Further, a difference was noted in meaning teachers gave to giftedness depending upon the level of teaching experience at the beginning of the study. **Each teacher changed something about the meaning she gave to**

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giftedness from the beginning to the end of the study, which was following staff development. Teachers' perceptions also evolved during the study in relation to indicators of giftedness and classroom strategies.

Pseudonyms have been given to the community (Centerville), the school district (Pleasant Grove), the school of this study (Sinclair), and the five teachers (i.e., Britt - K, McKenzie - 1, Taylor - 2, Buchannon - 3, and Johnson - 4). Mrs. McKenzie will be described herein as her perception relates to the contextual setting of this study and the evolution of her beliefs and practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to ascertain and describe the operating perceptions of the five Sinclair classroom teachers toward giftedness among rural children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds before and after a specifically designed staff development program. The study also explored the influence of a systematic staff development plan on the teachers' instructional strategies designed to nurture giftedness.

A qualitative research design was utilized in order to describe the evolution of teachers' perceptions throughout the investigation. A case study approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1989) was uniquely suited for the description of each teacher's perception of giftedness, the influence of staff development as reported by the teachers, and the implementation of instructional strategies related to nurturing gifted potential. According to Yin (1989), case studies investigate how and why about "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 23). A case might be an individual, event, or entity (Yin, 1989). In the present study, the cases were derived from the teachers' perceptions, which guided decisions about identifying and nurturing giftedness as evidenced in classroom practices.

Research Questions

The research questions, which guided the investigation were constructed by the participant observer based on teaching experiences within Centerville schools and other rural settings. As a life-long citizen of rural communities, rural experiences provided a thorough understanding of the culture in general as well as the context being studied. The participant observer was reared

and obtained two college degrees in rural Arkansas. Fifteen years teaching experience also transpired in rural school districts. This investigation included information about the dynamic social context wherein five other rural teachers interacted with their students. In order to understand how teachers of economically disadvantaged rural children perceived giftedness, the following research questions were investigated:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers in a rural setting toward giftedness in children from economically disadvantaged conditions?
   A. What kind of influence do teachers perceive they have on the learning potential of rural economically disadvantaged children?
   B. What examples do teachers draw upon that indicate they influence the learning potential of rural economically disadvantaged children?
2. In what ways does a systematic plan for staff development influence teachers' perceptions and practices for rural economically disadvantaged populations?

The research methodology provided answers to the questions during three phases of the study. Phase I included interactions with teachers before staff development. Further, the collection of baseline data entailed the following: (a) gathering archival data on the community, parents, school, and teachers; (b) mapping the physical plant; (c) mapping the classrooms; (d) observing class sessions conducted by each teacher; and (e) conducting preliminary interviews with each teacher. Phase II of the study transpired during inservice sessions. The inservice sessions consisted of four half-day presentations. Each session was conducted by a different regional expert and provided information about identifying and nurturing gifted potential within a rural context. Phase III followed inservice sessions and included extended staff development. During extended staff development, the participant observer conducted demonstration lessons, offered team planning, and organized learning experience trips for the students. Exit interviews were conducted at the conclusion of Phase III.

The following is provided in order to present the relationship between each phase of the study, the purpose of the study, and the research questions.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Phases of the Study	Purpose	Research Question to be Answered
I Before staff development (preliminary interviews and classroom observations)	Describe perceptions of teachers toward giftedness.	What are teachers' perceptions of giftedness?
	Describe teachers' perceptions of their influence.	To what extent do teachers perceive that they influence learning potential?
	Describe teachers' actions: instructional strategies.	What examples do teachers draw upon that indicate they influence students' learning potential?
II Beginning staff development	Describe teachers' responses and interactions during and after inservice sessions.	What are teachers' perceptions toward giftedness?
		To what extent do teachers indicate that they influence learning potential?
III Extended staff development (classroom observations and exit interviews)	Describe perceptions of teachers toward giftedness.	In what ways does staff development influence teacher perception and practices?
	Describe teachers' perceptions of their influence on learning potential.	

Rationale for the Study

According to researchers (Ellzey & Karnes, 1993), classroom teachers' observations and descriptions of students' behaviors are good indicators of giftedness when standardized test scores do not report advanced intellectual, academic, or creative abilities. However, classroom teachers' knowledge of giftedness, which is guided by perceptions, determines the actions they take toward identifying and nurturing gifted potential (Breard, Fletcher, Montgomery, & Spicker, 1993, Karnes & Lewis, 1997).

Further, the rationale for this study was based on early research which indicates that teachers from rural settings have special needs (Bull & Fishkin, 1987; Dettmer & Lane, 1989). Specifically, Spicker (1992) reported that isolation, low enrollment, and small budgets of rural schools required that rural educators be specially trained in characteristics of giftedness and program models for gifted children in order to be prepared to identify and meet rural students' needs (Anderson & Kleinsasser, 1986).

Lewis (2000) also suggested that rural educators of gifted populations need special training in program development, curriculum development, and gifted identification procedures for rural children. Consequently, teachers must be prepared with an appropriate knowledge-base in order to adequately identify and serve the needs of the rural gifted population from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

In this study, a comprehensive staff development plan was provided for five rural teachers. This plan included information about characteristics of giftedness and assistance with instructional strategies for locating and nurturing gifted potential. Descriptive research, which examined the school culture and perceptions of the rural teachers toward giftedness before and after staff development, assisted with understanding the influence of a systemic plan for staff development pertaining to identifying and nurturing gifted potential.

The study was embedded in the percepts of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1972). Symbolic interactionism, as a theoretical concept, was central to the rationale of the study for understanding teachers' initial perceptions and any change in those perceptions following staff development.

Blumer (1972) described the role of symbolic interactionism in descriptive research by stating that

"objects and events do not imply their own meanings" (p. 65). According to Blumer's theory, teachers of this study gave meaning to the concept of giftedness based on their interactions within the dynamic social context of the rural setting. Further, human interactions or experiences are an ongoing and changing process (Blumer, 1972) and may be influenced by systematic staff development.

Human perceptions or belief systems are based on the meaning that is given to interactions (Spradley, 1972). From those perceptions, actions are carried out (Blumer, 1972; Combs, 1972). In 1972, Combs noted that teachers' perceptions are more important than behaviors that they carry out since it is the perception, which guides the behavior or action. According to Combs (1972), "the crucial question for teacher education is not which behavior but how to bring about appropriate shifts in perception" (p. 288). To extend Comb's philosophy to gifted education, it is the teacher's perception of giftedness that guides the teacher's decision to nominate rural students from Sinclair for gifted services. Further, it is the teacher's perception of giftedness that guides decisions about the implementation of curriculum to nurture gifted potential.

For the teachers participating in this study, theories about perception (Combs, 1972; Spradley, 1972) apply as giftedness has been based on interpretations from teachers' social interactions (Blumer, 1972). In the school setting, these interactions have been with the rural students that they taught. A staff development plan was provided to give teachers the opportunity to rethink and redefine meanings that they previously held.

Qualitative methodology was appropriate for describing the evolution of teachers' perceptions throughout the investigation in relation to staff development (Lampert, 2000). Qualitative research consists of using "detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions and observed behaviors" (Patton, 1980, p. 22). The detailed description of the study unfolded as data was gathered on site from multiple sources (Patton, 1980) during each phase of the study.

Research Design

Teachers' perceptions were embedded in and shaped by the idiosyncratic characteristics of the rural community, the isolated elementary school, and the interactions among participants within the community and school. Therefore,

understanding the context of the rural setting and disembedding the perceptions of teachers involved a holistic model of case studies (Borg & Gall, 1989; Patton, 1980; Yin, 1989). The holistic approach to qualitative research design, which is open to gathering data on any number of aspects, allowed for a "complete picture of the social dynamic of the particular situation or program" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 383). Further, from a holistic approach, the researcher examined the contextual setting to determine the dynamics of the classroom environment (Charmaz, 1983; Lampert, 2000; Patton, 1980).

The Site

In this study, an appreciation of the site is integral to understanding the dialectics of the setting as influences on teachers' perceptions. The school participating in the study was a kindergarten through fourth grade school in rural Arkansas. Sinclair Elementary has maintained a staff of five teachers, one per grade level, contained in a single building for the past 16 years. The first full-time principal was overseeing the facility during the investigation. In the past, one principal divided his or her time between Sinclair and another elementary school within the Pleasant Grove School District (i.e., located in Centerville).

At the time of the study, the community population was approximately 18,500, the school district enrollment was 2,378, and the total number of children attending Sinclair Elementary was 87. Sinclair Elementary School is located on the very northeast edge of Centerville and is separated from the community by a branch of the Ridge River. At the beginning of the study, of the 87 students attending Sinclair Elementary, 63 were from low socioeconomic backgrounds according to Federal and Arkansas State financial parameters for receiving free or reduced breakfast and lunch. The number of students were divided by grade level as follows: (a) Kindergarten, N = 13; (b) First, N = 21; (c) Second, N = 21; (d) Third, N = 17; (e) Fourth, N = 15; Total, N = 87.

The collection of baseline data was for the purpose of showing the environment in which teachers and students interacted (Borg & Gall, 1989). In this study, baseline data included observations and a description of the physical plant, equipment, personnel other than classroom teachers in the school, teaching techniques, and the physical arrangement of classrooms. While it was not anticipated that a change would occur in the physical plant due to the study being conducted, it was believed to be an

important component of the children's lives in a school day. The facilitation of learning was a cooperative effort by 14 adults. Other than the five classroom teachers, the school staff consisted of a full-time principal, secretary, resource teacher, and Chapter I facilitator. Itinerant teachers include a part-time counselor, speech teacher, gifted and talented facilitator (other than the participant observer), music teacher, and physical education teacher.

Gifted Children at Sinclair

Educational opportunities have continued to provide Sinclair students with many learning experiences. However, few were identified as gifted. The school district established a program for gifted children in 1986. Over the following decade, 2% of the total student body at Sinclair were identified as gifted. When compared to 10% to 12% identified at the remaining elementary compuses within the school district, Sinclair repeatedly identified fewer gifted children than any of the other schools.

At that time, gifted children from another elementary school in Centerville were transported into Sinclair for program services one afternoon of the week. The purpose of bringing in other gifted students to Sinclair was an effort to break the isolation barrier between children within the community and provide a peer group among the gifted children.

Gifted, Talented, and Creative Identification

The procedures for identifying gifted children were implemented according to guidelines from the Arkansas State Department of Education. An explanation of the identification procedures offers further information important to understanding the overall context of the setting and teachers' perceptions therein.

Since the inception of the program for gifted children to present time, identification procedures for the gifted program have been based on multiple criteria in order to identify gifted (i.e., highly capable learners), talented, and creative. A case study approach has been used to include grades kindergarten through 12th according to the following guidelines.

The identification process begins with nomination forms which are distributed to and accepted from teachers, parents, community members, peers, or self. At the beginning of each school year, all teachers are provided a 30 minute inservice session. The session is conducted by the program facilitators who explain the identification process. Parents and the community are apprised of identification procedures at a public meeting or by a

notice sent home with students. While formal requests for nominations are made by memorandum twice a year, they are accepted at any time.

Stanford Achievement Test (Gardner, Rudman, Karlsen & Merevin, 1997) scores are also screened by the program facilitators each year to bring any student of high ability or achievement under consideration for the program. Historically, no Sinclair students were screened for assessment due to outstanding achievement test scores.

District-wide, when children have been nominated or screened for program services, permission has been requested from parents for further testing. The Early Prevention Test (Meisels & Wiske, 1983) is administered to kindergarten children who have been nominated; 1st through 12th graders are tested with the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1990). The Williams Creative Assessment Packet (Williams, 1980), which includes a creative thinking and creative feeling scale, is also administered to all program candidates.

Other scores, obtained from parent and teacher ratings, are included in the case study. The parents complete a scale from the Williams Creative Assessment Packet (Williams, 1980). The child's teacher completes Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students (Renzulli, Smith, White, Callahan, & Hartman, 1986) which indicate learning, motivation, and leadership characteristics.

Students, who are extraordinarily talented in the visual, performing, or vocational arts, submit portfolios or audition before the Fine Arts faculty. The Detroit Creative Products Scale (Byrnes & Parke, 1986) is used for screening visual and performing arts; the Purdue Vocational Scale (LeBold & Shell, 1980) is used for vocational arts. Further, when students do not score exceptionally well on assessment instruments but teachers and parent ratings are very high, samples of the student's creative products are included in the case study report.

A selection committee (i.e., comprised of at least five classroom teachers, one administrator and the facilitators of gifted education from within the school district) reviews all data. The committee members are made aware of identification policies, procedures, and the nature of the program through written communication and inservice training. Each child remains anonymous to the committee, and no single criterion or cut-off score is used to exclude a student from placement. Following the placement of a child into the program for gifted children,

a facilitator provides services by(a)pulling out identified students for two and a half hours per week,(b)consulting with classroom teachers to plan differentiated curriculum for gifted children, and/or(c)providing whole-class instruction that emphasizes critical and creative thinking for approximately one hour per week.

The facilitators of Pleasant Grove's GTC program realize that gifted, talented, and creative students may express themselves in a variety of ways, may emerge at certain times under certain conditions, and are not limited to any specific socioeconomic or ethnic group. The identification policies and procedures of Pleasant Grove's GTC Program were established with the specific intent of locating giftedness in rural students. However, the traditionally used methods of screening children (i.e., nomination or review of standardized test scores) who qualify to undergo the assessment procedure have been generally unsuccessful with Sinclair students. Of the 87 Sinclair Elementary children, only 2.29% were being served by the program for gifted students at the beginning of this study.

Inservice for Sinclair Teachers Prior to this Study

Before the study, inservice for teachers had been limited to a 30 minute session at the beginning of each school year in order to disseminate information regarding identification policies and procedures. Research findings (Anderson & Kleinsasser, 1986; Karnes & Lewis, 1997) indicate that effective staff development in regard to special populations (i.e., rural, economically disadvantaged) and gifted potential is a timely process of repeated inservice training.

Thus, the inservice training of this study was designed to disseminate more extensive information and heighten teachers awareness of which students might be eligible for nomination to be assessed. The procedures and presenters of the inservice training and extended staff development are described later in the chapter in chronological order with events at each phase of the study.

Method

Case Study Design

Since the teachers of this study have spent their lives or teaching careers within the rural community of this study, this descriptive research has been grounded in the teachers' perceptions based on their interactions with

rural children. Case study methodology was a most natural procedure to use because it provided information which linked cases (i.e., perceptions) and the relationships among cases (Yin, 1989). Specifically, case study design was the research strategy that provided the most useful approach for investigating how five rural teachers perceived giftedness and what guided their decisions and actions within the classroom.

Case studies were utilized in this study for reporting naturalistic inquiries in order to (a) demonstrate the interplay between inquirer (i.e., participant observer) and respondents (i.e., participants); (b) provide the "thick description" so necessary for judgments of transferability; and (c) provide a grounded assessment for the context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Simply stated, the case study design allowed for an "in-depth examination of an instance" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 360).

According to theory (Spradley, 1972), knowledge or perception of reality changes as new information is introduced. The inservice sessions, which were designed for this study, offered new information about giftedness to the five teachers. While nothing changed about the rural context, the significance to Spradley's (1972) theory was the possibility for a change in teachers' perceptions and instructional strategies due to new knowledge from inservice and follow up staff development.

Other theories (Blumer, 1972; Combs, 1972; Martin, 1968; Spradley, 1972) important to this study were from two theoretical perspectives: (a) how teachers' interactions with their rural students influenced their perceptions about giftedness, and (b) how new information influenced teachers' perceptions and actions. The nature of the theoretical framework provided an opportunity to focus closely on the teachers' beliefs about giftedness before and after staff development related to identifying and nurturing gifted potential.

Method of Data Collection

Multiple methods of data collection were used for this study to describe teachers' perceptual frameworks. Primary sources of information for this study were obtained through interviews with the teacher participants, which were conducted in the form of preliminary interviews and exit interviews. Systematic observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were conducted throughout the course of the study as a secondary method of obtaining data. Secondary sources of information also included (a) videotaping the interactions among teachers and students in classrooms, (b) interactions

between teachers and presenters during inservice training sessions, (c) evaluation forms following inservice sessions and (d) field notes collected by the participant observer. The secondary sources of information provided a means of constant verification. Through prolonged engagement, elements especially salient to teachers' perceptions of giftedness were found (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The timeline for collecting data is provided in the following.

Timeline for the Study

Phase	Amount of Time	Task
I	September 8 - October 12	Permission granted by Pleasant Grove School District's superintendent and principal of Sinclair
		The collection of baseline data including demographic maps, classroom observations, preliminary interviews
II	October 13 - December 21	Staff development with four inservice sessions three hours a piece, videotapes of inservice, classroom observations
III	January 4 - May 14	Staff development: assistance with teaching strategies, classroom observations with video-tapes, exit interviews

Staff Development

The staff development program began the week following the preliminary interviews. It was designed to emphasize the characteristics of giftedness and the enrichment of gifted potential in rural children. Inservice training was conducted in four consecutive sessions from October 13 through December 21. Each session was three hours in length for a total of 12 hours. The teachers were released from their classrooms from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. for three of the sessions. One of the sessions was conducted on a Saturday morning from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Substitutes

for the teacher's classrooms on the three afternoons and compensation pay for the Saturday morning were provided by the superintendent of Pleasant Grove's School District. The inservice included the following topics: (a) Critical Thinking Strategies to Nurture Gifted Potential in the Regular Classroom presented by the Director of a Regional Education Cooperative and President of Arkansans for Gifted and Talented Education; (b) Giftedness: What it Means in Rural Settings presented by a Director of Gifted and Talented Education from a nearby university; (c) Creative Thinking: Assessment and Curriculum presented by the Director of the Regional Education Cooperative; and (d) Differentiated Curriculum to Nurture Giftedness presented by the Coordinator of Pleasant Grove's Gifted, Talented, and Creative Program.

During the inservice sessions, field notes and videotapes were collected in order to document the teachers' comments and interactions with the presenters for a better understanding of teachers' reactions to new information offered during Phase II. Incentives for teachers to participate included release time from their classrooms and materials to assist with teaching critical and creative thinking curriculum. Following each inservice session, teachers completed evaluation forms. The information provided data about the benefit derived from the inservice according to each teacher and the need for further information.

Phase III of the study, which lasted approximately five months, was designed to implement the teaching strategies learned from the inservice training sessions. Continued staff development consisted of team planning and teaching, learning experience trips, and supporting teachers with information and materials. The lessons planned and taught consisted of activities pertaining to critical and creative thinking in order to promote the enrichment of gifted potential.

Throughout the final phase of the study (i.e., beginning after inservice training), observations, videotapes, and field notes of the classrooms and teachers' interactions with students were collected. Phase III concluded with exit interviews.

Relationship Between Research Questions and Data Collection Procedures

Research Questions		Primary Source	Secondary Source	Data Analysis
Preliminary	Exit			
Teachers' Perceptions of Giftedness In Rural Children				
What are primary characteristics of giftedness?	What does gifted mean?	Interviews (Phase I, II, & III)	Observations	Constant Comparative
	What does gifted potential mean?		Field Notes (Phase I, II, & III)	Contextual Analysis Description
What kinds of talents are visible in the rural children?			Videotapes (Phase II & III)	
Teachers' Perceptions of Students' Background Affecting Giftedness				
Describe the backgrounds of students.	What effect does background have on the development of gifted potential?	Interviews (Phase I, II, & III)	Observations	Constant Comparative
Describe the parental influence.			Field Notes (Phase I, II, & III)	Contextual Analysis Description
			Videotapes (Phase II & III)	
Teachers' Perceptions of Their Influence on Giftedness				
What influence do teachers have on the development of gifted potential?	How do teachers influence learning potential?	Interviews (Phase I, II, & III)	Observations	Constant Comparative
			Field Notes (Phase I, II, & III)	Contextual Analysis Description
	What events and teaching strategies implemented by teachers nurture giftedness?		Videotapes (Phase II & III)	

Analysis

At each phase of the study, indicators of giftedness and the teachers' perceived influence on learning potential will provide a context for describing change in perceptions. Interviews, observations, and videotapes were used in this analysis.

Indicators of Giftedness

The first grade teacher, Mrs. McKenzie, had been teaching for 3 years. All of her teaching experience had been at Sinclair. During Phase I, the theme most central in Mrs. McKenzie's description of a gifted child was academic excellence. Initially, she stated, "I think of academically well rounded" (C. McKenzie, interview, October). Mrs. McKenzie mentioned leadership and creativity as indicators that determined giftedness but again emphasized the importance of exceptional academic performance.

> I look for leadership ability. If they are able to help me in the classroom and understand what I want them to do and they can do it, especially in the first grade, that is something. And I also look at creativity in art work, but I can't make that my main thing to look at because I know that they also need to be able to do well academically.

Leadership skills also guided Mrs. McKenzie's decisions about which children might be gifted. She described a girl who performed exceptionally well in the classroom as well as on standardized tests the previous year. However, she had not referred the child for program services. Mrs. McKenzie said that she had not nominated the student because "if we went by achievement tests only, she achieved well. But like I said, I look at leadership ability" (C. McKenzie, interview, October). Mrs. McKenzie explained the student was quiet, withdrawn, non-social, and lacked self-confidence.

She also talked about creativity in gifted children's ability to write stories compared to other children. However, she had not nominated students to be formally assessed for program services based on creative behaviors. The following was a response to the preliminary question related to talents visible in her students:

> I have children who may not be able to write a story, but they can tell a story. With the gifted program [last year], they made books. I was very impressed with their ability to write stories. Yet, some children may not be able to write in an impressive

manner with no grammar or punctuation skills, but they have an imagination (C. McKenzie, interview, October).

The preceding response was an indication that Mrs. McKenzie saw potential in some of her students to possess exceptional creative ability. However, in the analyses of interviews during Phase I, it became apparent that although she recognized other talents as indicators of giftedness, her description of giftedness was embedded in academic performance. Further, her actions indicated that leadership was just as important as academic excellence. Consequently, Mrs. McKenzie would not have considered nominating a "story teller" alone for program services if the child lacked academic or leadership abilities.

Mrs. McKenzie initially described the relationship between her feelings about identifying giftedness and her teaching experiences in an isolated school. She felt that her lack of experience outside the Sinclair community effected her ability to "know" about giftedness. Mrs. McKenzie (interview, October) said, "I really have nothing to compare our children to. Until other teachers come over here and tell me what we're missing out on, I really don't know."

During Phase III, Mrs. McKenzie changed her description of giftedness from Phase I. About gifted children she said:

> It is a child who catches on to things rather quickly has something that stands out above all other children whether it is academics, creativity, artistic ability. He or she is unlike all the other children in some aspect (C. McKenzie, interview, May).

A major difference in Mrs. McKenzie's description of giftedness from the Phase I to Phase III was the deletion of leadership ability as an indicator of giftedness. While she did not address the reason for eliminating leadership, at least two inservice presenters discussed the possibility that rural homes might discourage their children from exhibiting precocious and/or leadership abilities.

She also separated artistic ability from creativity during Phase III. According to her original explanations of giftedness, she mentioned that creativity might be evidenced in students' art work. Even so, she had not nominated a student for program services based on creative behaviors.

During Phase III, Mrs. McKenzie expanded her views on creativity to include creative potential and creative ideas. There was also an emphasis on creativity as an indication of giftedness that did not exist previously.

She considered the impact of the environment on the development of students' potential by stating, "A child who has not been given the opportunities to express creative or gifted [behaviors], may have all those abilities, and we may not have seen it yet" (C. McKenzie, interview, May). Mrs. McKenzie described the importance of activities to encourage the development of creativity by specifically addressing creative thinking and brainstorming as noted in the following excerpt:

> I find myself looking for things in the textbook that will extend the creative thinking. I have really started to pull things and get some more creative thinking going. Yesterday, we were doing letter writing. And I thought, 'What can we do that is creative?' I thought, 'OK, we can do some brainstorming.' I do think about doing the things that Ms. Julie has shown us about creative and critical thinking. We brainstormed a list of funny characters and wrote them letters. The creative part was thinking about where this person might live.

She proceeded to give an example of one student's response which was: Mickey Mouse, 89 Cartoon Studio, Disney World, 77240. The activity ended with the students addressing envelops to their character and placing their letter inside as if they would be mailed. The examples that Mrs. McKenzie provided indicated that creativity might be developed or evidenced as students shared their ideas or produced unique products in the classroom.

Mrs. McKenzie's used new teaching strategies following staff development more often than any other teacher. In videotapes during Phase III, students were viewed working together on the floor to create a pollution mural, using the computers to create stories, and creating a mural showing the community in relation to Arkansas and the world. During Phase I of the study, Mrs. McKenzie perceived that giftedness existed among her rural students. However, she did not guide students in activities which were devised to nurture creative potential until Phase III. During Phase III, Mrs. McKenzie was making attempts to offer creative experiences for her students which provided her the opportunity to witness and/or development creative behaviors.

Mrs. McKenzie also changed her description of gifted children somewhat during Phase III as she used new teaching strategies which were described or modeled during inservice. Yet, nothing changed about Mrs. McKenzie's beliefs in regard to barriers outside of school for

Sinclair students. The following section enumerates her beliefs about the backgrounds of Sinclair students.

Mrs. McKenzie's Influence on Potential

During Phase I, Mrs. McKenzie directed responses about her influence on students' learning potential to the academic success of students. More specifically, she described her influence by giving examples of students learning to read as stated in the following:

> It's always a success when they learn how to read. That is the most wonderful thing about first grade. I get to see when they actually begin reading because I have very few children that come to my classroom already able to read (C. McKenzie, interview, October).

During exit interviews, Mrs. McKenzie said that she was more aware of the importance of nurturing gifted potential, and that in the past she had taught her students the way she was taught. "Even in high school I was not taught to think. I was taught facts that were to be remembered, recalled - no thinking skills" (C. McKenzie, interview, May). While she mentioned the importance of model lessons in her description of nurturing giftedness, she attributed her change in teaching strategies to the inservice training by saying, "It has really been helpful having the workshops that you have led. I find myself looking for books in the library that will extend thinking" (C. McKenzie, interview, May). Mrs. McKenzie also gave some specific examples of how she was influencing students' critical thinking through teaching strategies.

> I am beginning to learn that if a child can think beyond 2 + 2 = 4 and start thinking why, then that is going to help him in life more than anything. Yesterday, we were counting money in math. I was using the overhead. And they were having to think what steps to go through in a process in order to get the answer to the problem.

Continuing her discussion of her influence, Mrs. McKenzie offered examples of activities to encourage creative thinking in the following:

> We have done lots of "what if" activities lately in the classroom related to reading and language arts. What if your dog could talk? What if an alien came to visit you? At Christmas, we did lots of things like, how does snow make you feel, or how do presents make you feel? But the thinking part is telling me why (interview, May).

Mrs. McKenzie also mentioned that teachers can have an influence on developing students' potential through enrichment experiences such as field trips "like going to Little Rock to see Sleeping Beauty or to the Children's Museum in Memphis. You all have done tremendous things that have enabled us to go have so many experiences. The kids have benefited greatly" (C. McKenzie, interview, May). In conjunction with Mrs. McKenzie's examples of lessons that included creative and critical thinking, classroom observations provided further examples of enrichment activities.

Videotapes during Phase III captured students creating African prints with an instructor of art from the nearby university, creating chants about vowels, and illustrating pages for a story book. Videotapes were triangulated with field notes and interview data. As Mrs. McKenzie described the increased use of varied enrichment strategies, scenes from videos validated. The following graphic represents changes that occurred in Mrs. McKenzie's knowledge about characteristics of giftedness and practices related to nurturing giftedness.

Mrs. McKenzie: Changes in Accumulated Knowledge or Operational Practices

	Phase I	Phase III
Language Describing Giftedness	academically well rounded, leadership and creativity	something stands out (academics, creativity, artistic ability)
Language and Awareness for Enrichment	(none observed)	creative thinking, critical thinking, thought provoking questions, learning experience trips, thinking through processes, hands-on projects

Narrative Analysis: McKenzie's Perception

Mrs. McKenzie's perceptual framework consisted of her background, her beliefs, and her actions. Initially, Mrs. McKenzie believed that giftedness depended upon academic performance. A gifted child would be one who learned basic skills quickly and made excellent grades. Underlying that belief was the philosophy that gifted persons would be conscientious learners and performance oriented (e.g.,

complete work perfectly, follow direction, follow through with instructions).

Further, giftedness would be evidenced in leadership ability. A gifted first grader would be an out-going group leader who was able and willing to guide and assist others. Mrs. McKenzie gave specific examples of leadership qualities (e.g., when a first grader was able to understand directions and assist her by carrying through with the directions independently).

During Phase I, Mrs. McKenzie viewed her primary role as a teacher of basic skills. Everything about her classroom structure indicated the most important objective was teaching students to read, spell, and write. In view of her philosophy about the manifestation of giftedness, the behaviors that she expected to see as an indication of giftedness (i.e., excellent academic performance) matched her classroom goals and structure. As noted earlier, initial classroom observations indicated that lessons consisted of workbook pages about sounds, skill sheets in math, and spelling words to be regurgitated.

Mrs. McKenzie began judging giftedness differently during Phase III and considered a variety of characteristics (e.g., academics, creativity, artistic ability) important to determining giftedness. However, she emphasized creative behaviors as an indication of giftedness when she nominated two students for the gifted program near the end of the study. Further, she indicated an awareness that creative potential might be enhanced within the classroom as multiple learning experiences were made available to students.

As Mrs. McKenzie changed her description of the attributes of a gifted child, she also changed her actions. She provided opportunities for students to express themselves creatively. Near the end of the school year, Mrs. McKenzie made reference to students' products that were consistently unique compared to the class overall. The change in her perception of giftedness and her actions resulted in the use of creative thinking and products to determine which rural students were nominated for program services.

While Mrs. McKenzie provided the opportunity for students to demonstrate the abilities that might indicate giftedness, other factors guided her overall perception. Mrs. McKenzie believed that parental influence was a key factor in determining which Sinclair children were gifted. Parental influence included positive interactions with the child, interest in the child's education, educational

background of the parents, and genetics. First, Mrs. McKenzie stressed that when parents motivate a child toward learning, the child is more likely to develop gifted potential. Second, a child feels that education is important if the parents are interested in the child's performance. Third, if the parents themselves are educated, it is an example that education is important. Mrs. McKenzie believed that the opposite existed when parents did not promote or support the education of a child. Therefore, there was less chance that the child would exhibit giftedness.

The final factor important to giftedness in regard to parental influence was genetics. Mrs. McKenzie believed that the gifted child she taught the year before had a gifted mother. She said that the mother had been a rapid learner and had performed very well academically. While holding to the view that positive educational experiences in the parents' backgrounds greatly increased to the chance of identifying giftedness among Sinclair students, Mrs. McKenzie felt that she too could influence giftedness. Her perceived influence varied from Phase I to Phase III of the study. Initially, her primary concern was that she teach children to read. At the conclusion of the study, she stated that she was learning how to provide activities that would encourage critical and creative thinking which were also important life skills. The change in Mrs. McKenzie's perception resulted in the nomination of two students to be assessed for program services. Both students exhibited creative potential. One student was not only lacking in academic abilities but was severely dyslexic.

Summary and Conclusions

The comparative analysis of five rural teachers' perceptions toward giftedness continued throughout this year-long study. An assumption was made initially about a single case for teachers' perceptions since all teachers had similar rural backgrounds. However, during the accumulation of baseline data, differences emerged that indicated multiple cases. For example, five teachers utilized four categories to determine giftedness among their rural students. These categories were academic excellence, advanced thinking, creativity, and leadership ability. Further, there were more pronounced differences at the beginning of the study than at the close of the study.

During Phase I, one teacher (e.g., McKenzie) relied on exceptional academic performance or advanced thinking

abilities, which were believed to be evident in students' classroom performance to determine which students might qualify for gifted educational services. Following staff development, Mrs. McKenzie changed her definition of giftedness to include creativity as a characteristic of giftedness. More importantly, she changed teaching strategies to include activities that were geared toward enhancing creative potential.

Each teacher changed something about her perception of giftedness from the beginning to end of the study. Especially, Mrs. McKenzie indicated that the change in perceptions of giftedness was due to an awareness that "gifts and talents do live here" even when the exceptional abilities or potential were not apparent. Teachers also acknowledged that an awareness of giftedness (e.g., how to judge creativity or how to nurture creativity) was the result of staff development. Knowledge was obtained through the inservice sessions; support was provided to teachers following inservice sessions.

Another factor that distinguished teachers' perceptions before and after staff development was the manner in which they chose to implement enrichment. Two teachers (Britt and Buchannon) were observed using some enrichment before staff development. Two teachers (Johnson and McKenzie) implemented enrichment following staff development. One teacher (Taylor) acknowledged the importance of enrichment following staff development but did not make any observed changes in her classroom practices.

From Phase I to Phase III, change was evidenced in the teachers' perceptions of their influence on their rural students' learning potential. During Phase I, teachers all felt that they influenced learning potential despite any external barriers to the development of potential. Yet, they had differing views about how they influenced learning potential. Each felt that she influenced students' potential in affective, academic or experiential realms. During the Phase III, teachers views about their influence became more similar to one another as each felt that gifted potential was influenced through activities that involved students in thinking questions, creativity, "hands on" activities, and/or community resources.

Classroom teachers in one rural setting were receptive to staff development about giftedness. The positive results of staff development were visible when five Sinclair students were nominated for the gifted program by the

classroom teachers and four of the five were identified as gifted by the school district's selection committee. It should be suggested that other low socio-economic settings examine the possibilities for staff development about gifted potential, especially when the recognition of giftedness is dependent upon the meaning classroom teachers give to "gifted".

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